

UvA-wide dialogue on collaboration with third parties/fossil fuel industry

Notes of the Round Table discussion on *Roles of the UvA*

Roeterseiland Campus 06-06-2023

Question discussed:

- What should be the roles of the UvA in the energy transition? How should the UvA participate in the sustainable energy transition with third parties?

Key insights:

Overall:

- Some people were in favor of a total ban on the fossil fuel industry. However, most participants at the table managed to consider what a potential collaboration might look like.
- Some were very much in favor of collaborating with the fossil fuel industry, in order to stay relevant and to take up our responsibility to future generations. Working with the fossil fuel industry gives the UvA access to a wealth of data, knowledge, testing opportunities. If we ignore or dismiss their position, we can't know where they stand.
- One of the roles that the UvA should pick up is a leadership role: pressure on companies, sectors but also national and European politics to make the transition. We should be in the lead rather than following.
- There should be a transnational transition strategy. Without that, working with the fossil fuel industry is always going to be problematic. The UvA could take the lead in devising such a strategy.
- We shouldn't be seen as legitimizing the destructive aspects of the fossil fuel industry. We should have a dual policy: universities make clear that they disagree with the destructive aspects of the fossil fuel industry while at the same time working with their renewables divisions to work towards the energy transition and to help change the sector from within.
- Some participants hold that the university has a specific function, namely, to increase knowledge and commit to the democratization of knowledge. The question is whether a company that is antithetical to that can be a partner. Parties that have engaged in disinformation – should we allow them to gain access to our knowledge.
- Receiving funding from fossil fuel companies is problematic as it may set our agenda while we should be setting our own agenda. Also, seeing their actions on disinformation in the past, the data they give access to may not be the whole data but only those that they want to disclose.
- It was said that all projects should lead to the pursuit of new knowledge. Next to that, there should be an alignment with our values. Also, it should be demonstrated that the project will credibly have a contribution to the goal of the energy transition.

With regard to the different roles the UvA has, the following views were put forward:

- The participants found the role of education to be the most problematic. By giving the fossil fuel industry a platform, we amplify their influence, which is already too significant. Many participants were of the opinion that internships or presentations from the fossil fuel industry should not be allowed. If any collaboration is pursued in this area, they suggested inviting them for an honest discussion with other organizations so that students can make informed decisions.
- Some participants believed that the fossil fuel industry should also be invited to career events since students ultimately make their own choices. Also, it may lead to change from the inside because of the pressure of new generations of employees. However, some participants felt that this approach went too far. Some participants proposed that students should have a say in whether they are invited or not.
- The participants found the role of research and valorization of research to be the least problematic. A significant number of participants felt that research projects with the fossil fuel industry should be possible, provided strict conditions are met. These conditions could include a direct link to accelerating the transition to sustainable energy, exchange, and correlation with the UvA's mission statement and third-party involvement, evidence of past reliability in advancing sustainable energy transition, complete transparency regarding their role in the energy transition, and the public release (open-source, patent-free) of research results.
- It was also suggested that the UvA should only participate with parties in the energy sector that are fully sustainable. Fossil fuel companies that also invest in renewable energy would have to split up in a company that does fossil and another that does renewable.
- Some participants were even stricter, demanding a new business model and reparations for the damage caused, or suggesting that the fossil fuel industry could only participate in historical research on how we reached this point.
- Finally, it would be beneficial for the UvA to play an active role in societal engagement. The more the UvA can contribute to the energy transition, the better. The academic community has brought climate change to the forefront, so it aligns with our role to participate in public debates and inspire organizations to take action.
- Decisions on these matters should be made in consultation with the students. Some participants insisted that students should be actively involved through a democratic process.
- Lastly, it was suggested to actively educate students about greenwashing and be transparent about the organizations with which they collaborate.